

## MONTHLY LETTER

*Devoted to Spiritual and Philosophical Problems -- by Manly P. Hall*

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### MOHAMMED, PROPHET OF ISLAM

Dear Friend:

Mohammed, Prophet of Islam, the "Desired of all Nations," was born in Mecca on the 23rd of April, A. D. 571, at the hour of the rising of the morning star. He was born into one of the noblest families of Arabia which traced its genealogy back to the patriarch Abraham. The name of the Prophet's father was Abdallah and his mother was Amina of the family of Zuhra. The parents of the Prophet were of exceptional virtue in strong contrast to the general corruption of their day, and their marriage, the mingling of two noble houses, was a matter of great rejoicing. The shadow of death, however, was present at the nuptials. ~~Abdallah, pressed by the urgency of his business, made~~ a hurried journey to Syria, leaving behind his young bride. He was stricken with a fatal illness on his journey homeward and passed away in Medina. The Prophet was therefore a posthumous child.

The birth of the Prophet was accompanied by signs and wonders. Of these Washington Irving wrote: "His mother suffered none of the pains of travail. At the moment of his coming into the world a celestial light illuminated the surrounding country, and the newborn child, raising his eyes to

heaven, exclaimed: 'God is great! There is no God but God, and I am his Prophet.' Heaven and earth, we are assured, were agitated at his advent. The lake Sawa shrank back into its secret springs, leaving its borders dry; while the Tigris, bursting its bounds, overflowed the neighboring lands. The Palace of Khosru, the king of Persia, shook to its foundations, and several of its towers were toppled to the earth."

The time of the Prophet's birth was also remembered because it coincided with the effort made by the Christian chief Abraha to destroy the Caaba at Mecca. The Meccans, being outnumbered by their enemies, ~~could not protect their temple. Therefore~~ they prayed to Allah that he protect his own house. It is reported that before Abraha could enter the city smallpox broke out in his army destroying the greater part of his soldiery and he was forced to depart without reaching the Caaba.

According to the custom of Arabia the infant Mohammed, when but a few days old, was given into the keeping of Halima a nurse belonging to the tribe of Banu Sa'd. He stayed with Halima until his sixth year when the nurse returned him to

his mother. Soon after the reunion of mother and son Amina undertook the journey to the tomb of her husband at Medina. The child travelled with her and on this journey was bereaved of his mother who died upon the way leaving him an orphan in his sixth year.

The Prophet's father had many brothers but it was the grandfather Abdul Muttalib who assumed the guardianship of the boy. When Mohammed was eight Abdul Muttalib died and Abu Talib, the paternal uncle, took him into his house and heart. There is a legend concerning the childhood of the Prophet to the effect that while he was still an infant the angel Gabriel, with seventy wings, appeared to him. Opening the breast of the child, Gabriel took out the heart and cleansed it of the black drop of original sin which was supposed to be in every human heart because of the perfidy of Adam. The angel then returned the organ into its proper place in the Prophet's body and bestowed his blessing upon the future teacher.

Mohammed developed the deepest affection for Abu Talib and was his constant companion. When the boy was in his twelfth year Abu Talib made a long caravan journey to Syria and, after considerable pleading his nephew was permitted to accompany him. It was this journey which brought Mohammed for the first time into contact with the Christian sects that dwelt in monasteries in remote parts of the desert. Among the Nestorian Christian communities Mohammed met a strange and mysterious monk named Bahira. The monk, apparently possessing clairvoyant powers, predicted Mohammed's future and warned Abu Talib to take the greatest care of the young man for God should call him out of the wilderness.

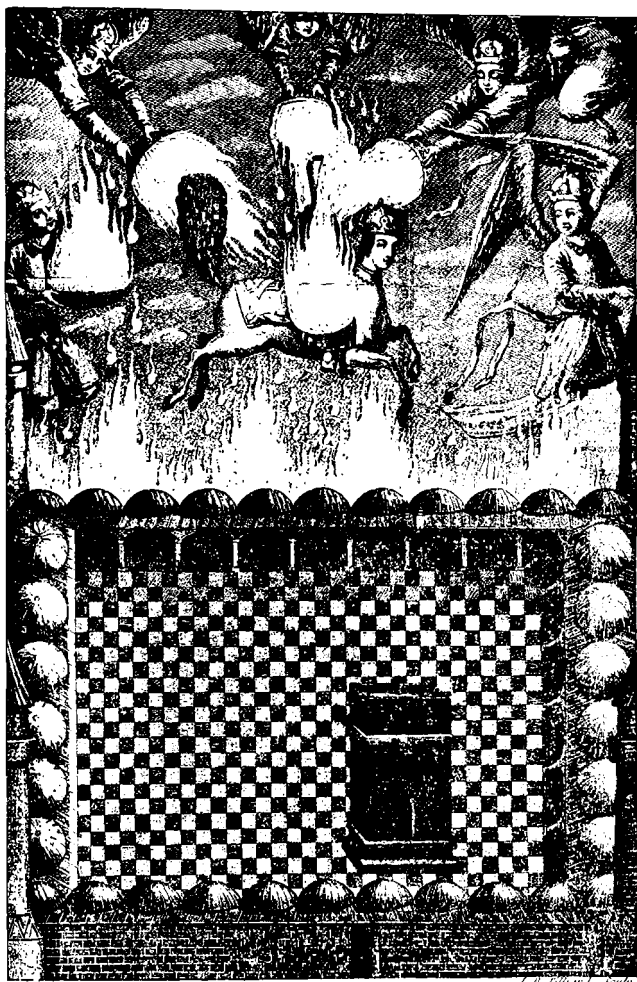
By his twentieth year Mohammed had established himself as a respected and admired citizen of Mecca. He was given the name of Al-Amin which meant the trustworthy or the honorable. His judgment had come to be highly valued and his coming greatness was casting its shadow before it. About this time the Meccans decided to rebuild the Caaba, the cube-like temple which they had

consecrated to their pagan faiths... Everything moved along smoothly until the time came to move the black stone, the areolite of Abraham which was said to have fallen from heaven and is regarded as one of the most sacred relics in the world of Islam. Each of the important families of Mecca felt that they were privileged to move the stone into its new place, and civil war threatened. At last a very wise and aged man asked to be heard and recommended that an arbitrator be chosen. He suggested that the first person to appear at the Caaba on the following day should be given the choice of deciding who should move the stone, and that all the other factions should agree. The families agreed and waited expectantly. On the following morning the first to appear was Mohammed, which circumstance gratified all of the factions for his honesty and wisdom were household words. Mohammed caused a white cloth to be laid on the ground. Picking up the stone himself he laid it on the cloth, then calling for representatives from all of the families, he bade them each take hold of the cloth all around. In this way all of the factions carried the stone and harmony was reestablished.

The widow Khadijah, inheriting a considerable business from her deceased husband, chose Mohammed to manage her affairs. The wisdom of her choice was soon manifest for under his wise and careful management her fortune was greatly increased and all of her affairs ran smoothly. Khadijah, well pleased, offered herself in marriage to the young manager, fifteen years her junior, and through this alliance Mohammed became one of the chief men of Mecca, enjoying everything that wealth and position could bestow. Six children were born from the union, four daughters and two sons. Only one, Fatima, the youngest of the daughters, survived their father and she outlived him by only six months. By another alliance, made later in life, after the death of Khadijah, Mohammed had one other son, Ibrahim. This child died in infancy.

Mohammed, now secure in worldly things, would have lived and died an honored merchant

among the Meccans had not another destiny stirred in his soul. The city of Mecca was the center of a decadent and dissolute paganism, the tradesmen of the community exploiting pilgrims and circulating superstitious doctrines about the idols Lat and Uzza. Outside of Arabia things were scarcely better. Christianity was in the throes of church coun-



*The Night Journey of Mohammed to Heaven on the back of Al-Borak. The face and body of the Prophet are concealed, according to the ordinances of Islam.*

cils and synods, perverting and misinterpreting the words of Jesus. Asia was in an uproar and the reforms of Buddhism were crumbling before the insidious machinations of Brahmin priests. Mohammed longed for the day when men might worship a true faith, freed from superstitions and intolerance,

and established upon an ample understanding. More and more religious matters dominated his thought. Khadijah encouraged him in his every effort, never reproaching him for neglecting his business or dissipating her fortune in charity.

He established the habit of retiring each year to a cavern on the side of Mt. Hira and here, in loneliness and sincerity, he cried out his plea that the religions of man might be purified and the ancient faith of the patriarchs be restored. His religious austerities began to take their toll of his physical health. Weakened in body, his heart aflame with his religious enthusiasm, Mohammed waited and prayed through the years, Khadijah watching over him with ceaseless devotion.

It was in the year 609 A. D. in the cave on Mt. Hira that the angel Gabriel appeared to Mohammed in the midst of the night, in the month of Ramadan. The angel held towards Mohammed a long scarf or shawl of silk upon which, traced in mysterious letters, was the first revelation of what was later to become the KORAN. Gabriel ordered Mohammed to read the words upon the silken strip. "But, alas!" said Mohammed "I do not know how to read." Twice again the angel ordered the Prophet to read and twice again the Prophet pleaded that he could not. The angel then read the verses for him assuring the Prophet that the power to read would be given him that he might bear witness to the Law.

Mohammed hastened back to discuss with Khadijah the vision. He feared at first that some of the evil spirits of the pagan faith were attempting to deceive him. But Khadijah reminded him that his life was above reproach and therefore there was no reason why he should be deceived. Encouraged by Khadijah, Mohammed accepted the revelation and prepared himself for his ministry as Prophet of Islam. Mohammed's long vigils had not only impaired his health but had brought about a condition which some writers have called "ecstatic swoons." Most of the Suras or verses of the KORAN were written while the Prophet was in a trance-like condition. The attacks which came over him often

*asserted themselves without warning and he would fall unconscious. On other occasions he would sit wrapped in blankets with the cold sweat pouring from his face and body even on the hottest day. While in this peculiar condition he would speak and his words were either noted down or else memorized by his small circle of devoted friends. It was in this way that a great part of the KORAN was written. Later in life Mohammed told his friend Abu Bakr that every white hair in his beard was a Sura of the KORAN.*

*Khadijah was the first convert to Mohammed's new faith of Islam, a testimony to his sincerity. For some years the Prophet circulated his inspired doctrines quietly and secretly among a few influential persons, for fear that the Meccans who thrived off the superstitions of the time would rise up and exterminate the cult. At last it was not possible to keep the secret longer. His increasing body of followers demanded public recognition and he announced his mission, already the head of a powerful faction. The Meccans retaliated with a plot to assassinate the Prophet. It was an ancient law that the city of Mecca was sacred and that blood should not be shed within its walls, but all the factions got together and acknowledging a common guilt arranged the details of the plot.*

*Mohammed, discovering the danger to his life, left the city, fleeing into the desert with Abu Bakr. For three days the fugitives hid in a cave, outwitting almost miraculously the Meccan horsemen who pursued them. The danger passed, Mohammed continued on to Medina where he joined a well organized group of his followers. The flight from Mecca to Medina is called "the Hegira" and is the basis of the Islamic chronological system. Mohammed reached Medina on June 28th A. D. 622 after a journey of eight days.*

*After the Hegira the powers of Mohammed steadily increased. The work of the Prophet was consummated with the conquest of Mecca. At the head of ten thousand followers Mohammed began the march to Mecca on the 10th day of the month of Ramadan in the 8th year after the Hegira. Islam*

*sees in this the fulfillment of the words of Moses: "He came with ten thousand holy ones." (Deut. 33 2). Mohammed entered Mecca with almost no bloodshed for he had given orders that none should be injured. Through disobedience to his command it is said that thirteen of his enemies and two of his own followers died in the conquest of Mecca. This could hardly be considered a bloody victory, and substantiates the general insistence of Islam that Mohammed was a prophet of peace and not of war. Mohammed entered Mecca bearing his standard, a banner made of the black veil of his wife. He circled the sacred Caaba seven times, then ordered the images in it to be cast down. He then rededicated the temple to the worship of the One God, eternal in the universe. The city thus gained new honors. The annual pilgrimage was established and even to this day each year the pilgrims of Islam cross the desert sands to the black shrouded Caaba, the axis of their faith.*

*Two years later, in the 10th year of the Hegira, Mohammed led the Valedictory Pilgrimage. It is said that a hundred and twenty-four thousand persons followed the Prophet. Seated upon the back of a great black camel in the courtyard of the Caaba, Mohammed spoke to his people with the realization that it would be his last journey to the Holy City. His words were repeated so that the most distant listeners might hear them, and the repetitions were like echoes, repeated again and again so vast was the assemblage. "Oh people! Lend an attentive ear to my words; for I know not whether I shall ever hereafter have the opportunity to meet you here." The Prophet then preached to the assembled faithful the virtues and codes of the faith. At the end of the address Mohammed cried out: "Oh Lord! I have conveyed thy message." And the voice of the multitude rolled back: "Oh Lord! Surely you have."*

*The Valedictory Pilgrimage completed, Mohammed returned to Medina where he remained until his death in the 11th year after the Hegira. Four years before an attempt had been made to poison the Prophet. He had however eaten only a small*

amount of the poisoned food, but his last years were spent in suffering, resulting from the slow inroads of the poison. Mohammed passed out of this life on the 8th of June in the year 11 A. H. (after the Hegira) in his 63rd year. His last words were: "Lord, blessed companionship on High!" He was buried under the floor of the apartment in which he died, at the side of the mosque in Medina. It is said that the Prophet's body was buried lying stretched out on its right side, with the right palm supporting the right cheek, and the face turned towards Mecca. With him were also buried Abu Bakr and 'Umar.

To summarize the character of the Prophet, he was generally acknowledged by those who knew him best to be a simple, earnest man, devoid of mannerisms and untouched by the grandeur complex. He marched with his followers, suffering every hardship they endured. He made his own clothes and pegged his own shoes. Considering the time in which he came and the people who received his message, his teachings were constructive and idealistic, pointing to the improvement of morality, the encouragement of study, and the refining of human relationships. Mohammed is frequently criticized for promulgating the doctrine of polygamy, but it should be remembered that this was the custom of his people which derived from the authority of Abraham, Jacob, David and Solomon. Mohammed was married to Khadijah at the age of twenty-five. She remained his only wife until the 3rd year of the Hegira when she died. Mohammed was married to Khadijah for twenty-five years. He never recovered from his grief over her loss and no other ever held the place in his heart or life equal to hers. After the Hegira the Prophet formed other matrimonial alliances principally for political reasons, being the custom of his time. Of those with whom he was associated, Aysha, daughter of Abu Bakr, was the only one who had not been previously married. The attitude of Mohammed himself was to encourage monogamy, and according to the laws he set down the most that a man could have was four wives or consorts. Among those with whom he formed alliances were several widowed persons

whom he married simply to protect. There is no evidence that Mohammed at any time during his life was addicted to any indulgence of any kind, his life being one of austerity and asceticism. Mohammed has also been maliciously misinterpreted in his attitude towards the state of woman after death, for it is clearly set forth in the KORAN that there is no inequality between the sexes in the eyes of God.

## THE DOCTRINES OF MOHAMMED

It is generally conceded by authorities on the Islamic cult that the doctrines of Mohammed were largely influenced by Jewish tradition. He drew heavily upon the laws and statutes established by Moses and the other prophets of Israel and nearly all of his legislations were influenced by the institutions of Jewish law. His religion grew up in a land where three religious systems were influencing the private and public life. Judaism, Christianity and Arabian paganism, the latter a worship of the stars, spirits and demons, all vied for the favor of the populace. That corruption had undermined each of these faiths must be conceded. Arabia was afflicted with innumerable decadent cults, superstition and imposture ridden. It was the evil of the time which produced the Prophet. The nobility of his own mind revolted against the iniquities of the perverted faiths.

The cosmogony which lies behind Mohammed's concept of the universe was similar to that which the Jews derived from the Chaldeans. The concept was geocentric and Ptolmaic. Above the earth and surrounding it were the seven heavens, the orbits of the planets, and beyond these the Empyrean or supreme heaven, the abode of God. There was a gate in each of the orbits of the planets, thus the approach to Deity was up a ladder of seven symbolic rungs, as in the Greek and Persian Mysteries. The whole conception is almost identical with that set forth by St. John in the Revelation. The Mohammedan paradise, a sphere of esthetic ecstasy, was located in the seventh heaven, below the footstool of God, and here were congregated the believers and

*those who during life had lived, preached or defended the doctrines of the Prophet. The Creation included not only the hierarchies of angels and men but a race of superhuman beings called Dzinn or Genii of whom many extraordinary tales are told.*

*According to the teachings of the KORAN certain animals reached heaven. These were the dog of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus, the ass that rebuked Balaam, Solomon's ant, Jonah's whale, the ram of Ishmael, the ass upon which the Queen of Sheba rode and her dove, the camel of Saleb, the ox of Moses, and an animal called Al-Borak upon which Mohammed ascended to heaven in the Islamic equivalent to the Apocalypse. Occasionally the ass upon which Jesus rode into Jerusalem is added or substituted for one of the other animals.*

*The sacred book of Islam is of course the KORAN, derived from the word Koraa which means "that which should be read." The KORAN is divided into 114 sections which may be termed chapters. They are not numbered and the arrangement of them has been subject to numerous changes. In the heading of each chapter it is noted at what place the revelation was given, whether at Mecca or Medina. The number of verses in the KORAN is about 6000. The book contains 77,639 words, and the number of letters is 323,015, and among the devotees of the faith it has been calculated with great exactitude how many times each letter is repeated in the whole work. Like the writings of the ancient Jews, it is agreed that there is a Cabbalah in the KORAN, and by the systems Notaricon and Gematria, familiar to scholars of cabbalistic literature, a mystical interpretation can be derived from the work.*

*The KORAN was written in the dialect of the tribe of Koreish, the most cultured of the Arabians, and it is universally acknowledged among the literary of the faith to be the most perfect and elegant example of Arabic literature. This beauty causes it to be referred to as the permanent literary miracle.*

*The most important point to be emphasized in the faith of Islam is the absolute unity of God. Mohammed makes no point of distinction between the God of Islam, Christendom and Israel, em-*

*phasizing merely that Israel and Christianity have departed from a proper understanding of the nature and power of the One and True God. Islam rejects the Trinity of Christendom, maintaining that the triune concept of God was not justified by the Scriptures but was an interpolation legislated into existence by the councils of the church. To Mohammed God is forever One and Undivided. Prophets and Messiahs are not personifications or embodiments of God but good men sent by God. With this condition Mohammed accepts the ministry of Jesus, acknowledging him to be a true prophet sent out of God, but denying that Jesus differed from other prophets sent in other ages.*

*Next to the teaching of the absolute Oneness of the Creator, the most outstanding point in the Islamic faith is its teaching of predestination, or the inevitability of that which will happen. Islam teaches that no man can escape his destiny; that regardless of his efforts that happens which is to happen. There are no accidents in the universe. In this teaching Mohammed seems to have sensed the universal laws which enclose man in the structure of inevitables. Fears and regrets are useless, each man must certainly meet his own tomorrow. Predestination is not complete fatalism in the ordinary sense of the word. It is true that a man cannot change that which is written for him in the Book of Life, but what man knows his destiny until he achieves it? It may be that the very struggle to avoid fate is part of the fate itself. A man struggling to escape mediocrity achieves a high estate only to discover in the end that his very struggle accomplished the destiny already appointed for him. The doctrine of predestination ordered life in Islam. Patience, serenity, resignation and a graceful acceptance of all that life gave or withheld—these were the virtues of Islam stimulated and perfected by the doctrine of predestination.*

*The Mohammedan confession of faith is in substance: "There is no God but the true God and Mohammed is his Prophet." Next in order to this confession are the six requisites of acceptance. A follower of the Prophet must first believe in God;*

second, in the hierarchies and angels; third, in the Scriptures; fourth, in the prophets; fifth, in the Resurrection and Last Judgment; and sixth, in the predetermination of good and evil. It can easily be seen from this outline how deeply Islam is indebted to the Jewish and Christian sacred books, for, with the exception of certain emphases, the three programs are identical.

Four duties are demanded of the follower of the Prophet. First he must practice prayer. Second he must practice charity. Third he must fast. And fourth he must make the pilgrimage to Mecca. Prayer is probably the most important of the living practices of the faith. The true believer must pray five times a day under any and all conditions, barring extreme illness. His voice in the morning and his voice in the night must be uplifted in prayer to the God who dwells in the East and in the West and in all the secret places of the world. There are two forms of the practice of charity. First a stipulated amount demanded for the common good, and second voluntary contributions determined by emergencies of the hour. Gifts may be of five things; of cattle or live-stock, of money, of corn, of fruit, or of wares that are sold.

Mohammed referred to fasting as the gateway of religion, and an early prophet called it one-fourth part of the faith. Fasting included not only abstinence from food but the restraining of all the senses and "the fasting of the heart from worldly cares." All Mohammedans are required by the laws of the KORAN to fast the whole of the lunar month of Ramadan, that is, they may not take food during the daytime of that month, and the fast is declared broken if they so much as smell perfumery. The rites of fasting appear in many primitive religions and are salutary dispensations against the intemperances of semi-civilized peoples. Through associating fasting and bathing with religion the physical well-being of the race was naturally increased.

The last of the prescribed duties was the pilgrimage to Mecca, and even in this late day it is the great moment in the life of the pious believer. To

die without visiting Mecca is almost as serious an offense as to die an unbeliever. Of course in the days when the members of the faith were limited to Arabia the pilgrimage was possible to nearly all of Islam, but now with believers scattered over the whole surface of the earth the literal fulfillment of the admonition to pilgrimage is impossible of accomplishment. Many thousands of pilgrims visit Mecca every year, but the millions that make up Islam cannot go there. But such as do accomplish the perilous journey, though bankrupt in financial matters, are highly honored in their communities and wear a twist of green voile about their fezzes that all the world may know they have visited the shrine of their faith.

The laws instituted by Mohammed, though actually a part of the faith, are not generally included in a survey of its religious elements. These laws were greatly in advance of those which they displaced, and those regulating industry and calling for the cooperation towards mutual betterment might be profitably studied by nations not of Islamic persuasion even in this late day. The laws regulating marriage and divorce, laws establishing punishment for criminals, laws administering public office—all these the Prophet had to formulate, apply and in some cases revoke where the experiments were not successful. It cannot be denied that in the main these laws elevated Arabia, bringing civilization and culture with them.

One of the most extraordinary legends in connection with Mohammed is the story of his "Night Journey to Heaven." In the midst of the night, as the Prophet lay asleep in Mecca, the angel Gabriel appeared before him and awakened him. After purifying the heart of the Prophet, Gabriel caused a strange animal to appear. This creature, which was called Al-Borak, was a white animal resembling a horse with a human head, and the tail of a peacock. The Prophet mounted upon the back of Al-Borak and was carried in an instant to Jerusalem and the Rock Moriah. After dismounting from the strange animal Mohammed beheld a ladder of golden rungs that had fallen from heaven. Climbing

up the rungs, Mohammed passed through seven gates at each of which stood one of the prophets of patriarchs. At the first gate stood Adam, at the second John, at the third Joseph, at the fourth Enoch, at the fifth Aaron, at the sixth Moses, and at the seventh Jesus. Passing through the gates, Mohammed was brought into the presence of God, but the face of Deity was veiled with thousands of veils. Even so obscured, the brilliance nearly destroyed the Prophet.

This vision gives a rather comprehensive view of the Islamic theory of the universe. Legends abound and traditions are without end, but beneath each of them is some mystical significance if studied and understood by the devout.

After the transition of the Prophet mystical sects sprang up to perpetuate the metaphysical interpretation of the KORAN and the traditions. Chief among these sects was that of the Dervishes. This order still wields considerable influence in the Moslem world. Another mystical movement of great significance is the Sufi. These metaphysical organizations show beyond doubt that in its inner parts the faith of Islam shares the common heritage of metaphysical secrets.

No portrait or likeness of the Prophet Mohammed has descended in the tradition of Islam. His tomb is a place of pilgrimage and a few relics are cherished in some of the more important mosques. It was against the wish of the Prophet that his followers should ever cast a likeness of him, therefore to this day only tradition survives to describe him. He is usually described as a large, well built man with majestic manner and long beard. There is a tradition that his beard was red or auburn.

From the time of its inception Islam patronized arts and sciences. It encouraged knowledge and culture and preserved some of the best of classical literature through the dark ages of Europe's obscurity. Arab culture came into Europe through Spain and for some time universities at Granada and the Alhambra were the leading educational institutions of Europe. It is recorded of the Moors that they built the first university for the education of women.

Arab scientists have contributed much to modern learning, including the Arabic numerals now in common use, the science of algebra, and the earliest experimentation in optics. Modern Islam, mingling its course with the life of the whole race, occupies an honorable place among the religions and beliefs of mankind.

## QUOTATIONS

"If I had two coats I would sell one and buy white hyacinths for my soul."

"The revelation of this book, there is no doubt thereof, is from the Lord of all creatures. Will they say, Mohammed hath forged it? Nay it is the truth from thy Lord, that thou mayest preach to a people, unto whom no preacher hath come before thee."

"He (God) knoweth that which entereth into the earth, and that which issueth out of the same, and that which descendeth from heaven, and that which ascendeth thereto; and he is with you, whosoever ye be: for God seeth that which ye do. His is the kingdom of heaven and earth; and unto God shall all things return. He causeth the night to succeed the day, and he causeth the day to succeed the night; and he knoweth the innermost part of men's breasts."

"Is it not true, that I came in your midst while you were misguided; so Allah guided you to the right path. You were indigent; Allah made you prosperous. You were ever at daggers drawn with one another; Allah created mutual affection in your heart."

"You must know that every Moslem is the brother of every other Moslem. You are all equal, enjoy equal rights and have similar obligations. You are all members of one common brotherhood. So it is forbidden for any of you to take from his brother save what the latter should willingly give."

"You have certain rights over your wives, and so have your wives over you \* \* \* They are the trust of God in your hands. So you must treat them with all kindness."

Yours sincerely,

MANLY P. HALL